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NSC BRIEFING

11 February 1954

HO CHI MINH

I. Question whether Ho Chi Minh is still in active control of Viet Minh continues to arouse conjecture among French and Vietnamese.

A. Importance of question lies in reputation Ho enjoys among many Viets and some French as being essentially a patriot, not inflexible, doctrinaire Communist.

B. From French point of view, therefore, Ho would be better man to negotiate with than typical hide-bound Communist.

II. If Ho is dead, no positive indication of it in Viet Minh propaganda up to the present.

A. Constantly referred to as being very active, addressing the Viet Minh assembly, and presiding over cabinet meetings.

B. Various Communist journalists claim to have interviewed him. Joseph Starobin of the New York Daily Worker said he saw Ho in March 1953.

C. French and Vietnamese experts believe that a photograph of Ho in their possession was taken between October 1952 and January 1953.

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- D. But Viet Minh almost invariably broadcasts Ho's statements in morse, not in voice.
- E. The latest public statement attributed to Ho was at the end of January when he called for a "Generalized Offensive" by VM forces everywhere to drive the French out of Indochina.

III. Name Ho Chi Minh is often translated as "He who enlightens." Previously known as Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen, the patriot.)

- A. Son of minor official in small village of northern Annam. Father was a revolutionary before him.
 - 1. In 1911, Ho went to sea as cabin boy with Messageries Maritimes. Visited England and US.
 - 2. Later settled in Paris and took up retouching photographs.
- B. Became member of French Communist Party at time of its formation just after World War I.
 - 1. In 1921 founded "Intercolonial Union," association of native peoples in French colonies.
 - 2. Wrote book, "The Indictment of French Colonization."

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3. In 1923 was delegate of French Communist Party to International Peasants Congress in Moscow. Stayed on in Moscow until 1925.

4. Between 1925-1941 shuttled between Russia and China organizing revolutionary groups among Vietnamese exiles.

C. In May of 1941 Ho turned up at Ching-hsi, Chinese village north IC border.

1. Founded League for Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh) as Anti-Japanese resistance movement.

2. Cooperated with Chinese Nationalists and, later, American military authorities.

3. After Jap surrender Ho became provisional president of Democratic Republic of Vietnam and stayed on good terms with French until rebellion broke out December 1946.

IV. In dealing with Westerners, Ho has convincingly represented himself as charming, kindly, learned old man of simple tastes and intense devotion to ideals.

A. Is in fact highly literate and speaks six or seven languages; has a keen sense of humor and irony.

B. In Viet Minh propaganda, Ho is "Uncle Ho," and all Vietnamese are his nieces and nephews.

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1. Depicted as a man of action, walking many miles a day among his troops carrying a heavy pack.
2. Man of letters, who never fails to compose a poem dedicated to the children of Vietnam on the occasion of their annual festival.
3. Man of the people, mingling among them and considering their individual grievances.

V. If Ho dead, two VM leaders whom French would deal with in any negotiations probably are:

- A. Truong Chinh, secretary general of Vietnamese Communist Party. His name means "Long March." He was one of several top-level Vietnamese Communists who worked behind scenes in days when Ho was dealing with French and Chinese Nationalists.
- B. Vo Nguyen Giap -- generalissimo of the Viet Minh. He is hard-core Commie and self-made military genius who was history professor in Hanoi before war.

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I. Is Ho dead or alive?

- A. Importance of question lies in Ho's reputation as patriot at heart.
- B. French could better justify deal with Ho than with other Viet Minh leaders.

II. Viet Minh gives no clue.

- A. Propaganda refers to Ho's activities.
- B. Daily Worker man says he saw Ho last March.
- C. Photo of Ho; believed taken late 1952.
- D. Ho's voice unheard on Viet Minh radio
- E. Ho quoted as rallying troops in late January.

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III. Aliases; "Who enlightens," "Patriot."

A. Joined C.P. in Paris early '20's.

B. Delegate to Moscow conf. 1923.

C. Organized Viet exiles 1925-41.

D. Organized Viet Minh in 1941:

1. Worked with Americans,
Chinese during war.

2. After war, Pres. of
Dem. Rep. of Vietnam.

IV. Charmed Westerners.

A. Highly literate; keen sense humor.

B. "Uncle Ho" in Viet Minh propaganda.

V. Probable alternate Viet Minh leaders.

A. Truong Chinh ("Long March");
obscure but powerful theoretician.

B. C-in-C Vo Nguyen Giap; former
history prof.

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